

Fam stairway

Rolf Harris had planned to be putting his feet up by now and enjoying a life of retirement. But at the grand young age of 64 this Aussie sport is enjoying fame and fan adulation like never before. And he loves it, as he revealed to GORDON BARR.

OLF, you're 64. Shouldn't you be taking things easy by now?

I was easing up a bit when the Stairway To Heaven thing suddenly happened in 1993. Now I've got a whole new career. I can't stop now.

How did Stairway To Heaven come about?
There is a show in Australia where every week someone came on and sang their own version of Stairway To Heaven. They wanted the definitive Rolf Harris version so we did it and it went down well and then we forgot about it. Eighteen months later I was told they wanted to do an album of all the different versions, including mine.

But that was Australia, how did it break here?
Somehow, a copy got to Simon Bates at Radio One. He played it every day. It was released and shot to number seven. It was amazing.

Had you been a fan of the song beforehand?
I'd never heard it in my life, didn't know who'd sung it and when I first heard the Led Zeppelin version I thought there was nothing I could do with it. Then I realised if it was to be covered it would have to be 100 per cent in my style.

Last year you played the Glastonbury Festival. That can't be bad for a man of 64.
That has to have been the single biggest thrill of my life. It was incredible. It's the biggest boost I've ever had. The orchestra couldn't hear me because of the screams. It was like a football match.

What made you play there?
The only reason I had the courage to do Glastonbury was that I had been doing university tours and they had been amazing. The first one was in Birmingham and it was all students—about 2,300 of them. It was supposed to be a

THE RUNDOWN ON ROLF

NAME: Rolf Harris
AGE: 64
BORN: Basenowend, Perth, Western Australia
LIVES: Mandurah, England
MARITAL STATUS: Married with one daughter
FAVOURITE FOOD: Curry but not hot too

FAVOURITE PLACE: Mandurah
FIRST RECORD BOUND: All Things Bright And Beautiful, by Joe Brown
PERSPECTIVES: With fan worship on a par with many of today's teenybopper groups, Rolf Harris's career may only be beginning

light-hearted stuff or the serious stuff. There's some really nice songs, like She'll Be Right and Yarrabangka.

Is there really a serious side to Rolf Harris?
Oh yes I get serious about a number of things. Most importantly I'm sorry about what we're doing to the environment. We need to take stock of it all. The sooner we get rid of all the rubbish we're polluting the environment with, the better it will be for all of us. We've got to start respecting the Earth and living within our means and not try to exploit the Earth so much.

Do you have any vices?
I don't smoke or drink. I get such a buzz out of just being me. You can be absolutely on adrenaline and glasses of water. I don't need to smoke or drink.

Do you have any regrets?
No, but I would like to have developed my painting further. I first had stood still for a long time now. If I'd been able to paint full time, it would have developed and got better. I just reproduce the same things, but effectively.

Do you regret?
What I've done through my life is present painting to an ordinary person in a way they've never seen it before. TV helped a lot. An ordinary person can be intimidated by art galleries. A lot of stuff that is presented wonderfully is just rubbish. There's a lot of stuff said about art that just isn't true. I think there's a lot of artists in the world who con ned people a lot. I don't like any of this pretentious stuff.

Do you regard yourself mostly as an artist?
I'm an entertainer. But an interesting thing is that in a survey done a couple of years ago, I came out as the best known artist in Britain. I think that says a lot for what I want.

Has your artistic fair been inhibited?
My daughter Bindi has just turned 30 and she's got an exhibition of paintings in New York. I'm so proud of her.

Rolf Harris is at Newcastle Riverside on Monday.

What were it like when you walked on stage?
I couldn't sing for 10 minutes, the crowd was making so much noise. And when I did, I couldn't believe what they wanted to hear—all the oldies like Jake The Peg, Big Dog and The Mc Kangaroo Down Sport. And they knew every word of every song. It was like adulation—I was the greatest thing that ever lived. That gave me the courage to approach the Glastonbury people.

Tell me about Glastonbury.
They put me on early I was second on the bill. When the first act appeared the crowd started to drift down. And by the time I was on, there were 80,000 people there. It was marvellous.

Were you surprised?
I was so nervous when I saw all those people. Then two roadies came up to me. They were big, rough, had all those tattoos and muscles. They told me I was the only one they were interested in seeing that day and asked if I'd sing Jake The Peg. I knew then I was going to be all right.

Did the crowd join in?
There were about 100 gidgeerodoo players in the audience and they started playing that game.

Now you're getting your greatest hits album, Dispersedly Done All That out, is it the definitive collection?
I would say so. All sides of me are on show on the album, from the

Victims wait with a smile
STAFF at Newcastle Riverside are eagerly awaiting Rolf's visit as they're going to be his victims during his show.
"To help to celebrate the venue's ninth birthday Rolf will paint a mural as part of his performance, and one of the highlights will be caricatures of Riverside's very own staff."
"Oh, we're delighted," said Lisa Cunningham, Riverside spokeswoman. "We're thrilled Rolf is going to join in the celebrations with us. He and I can't wait to see how he depicts us."
"It's going to be a great night for everyone, with drinks promotions and a party atmosphere."
"We've heard Rolf is doing a rendition of School's Out and other rock classics. Don't miss it!"

